



Expertise
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Utilizing Dialogic Reading to Support Intercultural Learning in Early Childhood Education

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<p>The aim of this bachelor thesis was to support intercultural learning and diversity awareness for children aged 3-6 enrolled in a Finnish Early childhood education centre. The main method used was the dialogic reading of diverse children's literature. This method was chosen based on the needs of the multicultural learning environment. Additionally, dialogic book and character bonding activities were used to assist children to connect more with the stories.</p> <p>Data for this functional thesis was collected using observation and note-taking. Afterwards, the findings were evaluated by reflecting on the theoretical framework. The functional part was evaluated based on children's feedback, level of engagement, observable emotions and reactions. Constructive feedback provided by educators, as well as parents was also considered.</p> <p>Availing a broad selection of diverse children's literature triggered children's curiosity. During dialogic reading sessions, children demonstrated empathy and problem-solving skills. Positive attitudes towards existing differences in the Finnish society were also generated. Acknowledging diversity represented in the group enhanced children's participation.</p> <p>Our conclusive opinion is that dialogic reading of diverse children's literature is an effective tool for increasing children's awareness in a rapidly evolving and multicultural society. An important discovery on our part that would serve as a recommendation for educators is that there is a wide range of diverse children's literature available in Finnish libraries suitable for intercultural learning. We also see the potential for enhanced cooperation with parents judging by their willingness to contribute and support the learning process.</p>	
Keywords	intercultural learning, diversity, diverse children's literature, dialogic reading, multicultural children's literature, children's participation, book bonding activities, early childhood education

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<p>Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli tukea 3-6 vuotiaiden lasten kulttuurienvälistä oppimista sekä tietoisuutta moninaisuudesta suomenkielisessä varhaiskasvatuksessa. Tutkimusmenetelmänä käytettiin dialogista lukemista käyttäen apuna moninaisuutta käsittelevää lastenkirjallisuutta. Tämä menetelmä valikoitui monikulttuurisen varhaiskasvatussyksikön luonteeseen ja tarpeisiin pohjautuen. Dialogisen lukemisen tuokioiden lisäksi käytimme erilaisia toimintoja ja ilmaisukeinon menetelmiä, jotka auttoivat lapsia eläytymään ja ymmärtämään luettuja tarinoita paremmin.</p> <p>Tämän toiminnallisen tutkimuksen tutkimusaineisto kerättiin havainnoimalla ja tekemällä muistiinpanoja, joita arvioitiin pohtimalla teoreettista viitekehystä. Toiminnallisen osuuden arviointi pohjautui lasten palautteelle, sitoutuneisuuden tasoille sekä havaituille tunteille ja reaktioille. Rakentava palaute varhaiskasvatussyksikön kasvattajilta sekä lasten vanhemmilta otettiin myös huomioon.</p> <p>Tähän tutkimukseen tarjolla olevista moninaisuutta käsittelevät kirjat herättivät lasten uteliaisuuden. Dialogisen lukemisen tuokioiden aikana lasten empatiakyky sekä ongelmanratkaisutaidot tulivat esille ja ne kehittyivät entisestään. Lapsille tuli positiivisempi käsitys erilaisuudesta Suomen yhteiskunnassa. Lapsiryhmän moninaisuuden huomioon ottaminen lisäsi lasten osallisuutta.</p> <p>Yhteenvetona voimme todeta, että dialoginen lukeminen, hyödyntäen lastenkirjallisuutta moninaisuudesta, on tehokas työkalu lisäämään lasten tietoisuutta nopeasti muuttuvasta ja moninaisesta yhteiskunnasta. Tärkeä asia, jonka toivoisimme kaikkien kasvattajien huomioivan, on se, että moninaisuuden oppimisen tueksi on suomalaisissa kirjastoissa saatavilla laaja valikoima moninaisuutta käsittelevää lastenkirjallisuutta eri kielillä. Huomasimme tutkimuksen aikana vanhempien kiinnostuksen moninaisuuden oppimiseen sekä sen tukemiseen ja näemme tässä mahdollisuuden tehokkaaseen yhteistyöhön vanhempien kanssa.</p>	
Avainsanat	kulttuurienvälinen oppiminen, lastenkirjallisuus moninaisuudesta, dialoginen lukeminen, lastenkirjallisuus monikulttuurista, lasten osallisuus, kirjoihin samaistumisen toiminta, varhaiskasvatus

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List of Abbreviations	
AFS	American Field Service
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
TENK	Tutkimuseettinen neuvottelukunta
UN	United Nations

Dedication

We dedicate this thesis to our children Yara, Asser and Daniela. You are our lives' most precious gifts from God, and our love for you is timeless. Shukran for your patience and encouragement during our "endless typing"

*May you always fly high your diversity flags and may your voices always be heard,
Inshallah!*

1 Introduction

The focus of this thesis is on the use of dialogic reading of diverse children's literature in early childhood education as a tool for intercultural learning. In this functional thesis, dialogic reading is used in combination with book and character bonding activities as pedagogical methods meant to provide children aged 3 to 6 with meaningful experiences that enhance awareness about diversity.

Our working life partner for this functional thesis is a daycare named Ullanmäen päiväkoti, which just like many other daycares in Espoo city, has children from various ethnic backgrounds and family structures. Cultural variations visible within daycare are children's different languages, religious backgrounds, dietary restrictions, as well as cultural and religious festivities. Because it is Finnish language daycare, a lot of effort is put into progressing the acquisition of Finnish language of every child including native Finnish children whose linguistic skills are also enhanced. Educators in this daycare work in collaboration with parents, a language and culture teacher, a special needs teacher as well as other professionals to support learning and development. The staff at Ullanmäen päiväkoti is also multicultural, and children also interact with substitutes from diverse backgrounds occasionally.

Our motivation to support intercultural learning in Early childhood education has its roots in our personal experiences. Before embarking on this project, we reflected on our separate and ongoing journeys of intercultural learning as immigrants of Kenyan and Iraqi origin living in Finland.

We can both attest to the positive feeling derived from being understood and can also identify encounters with both positive and negative cultural generalizations. We can also relate to the benefits of respecting and adapting to new cultures. Coming from countries with many tribes within them, we understand the need for peaceful coexistence amidst many subcultures. Additionally, with our combined skill set of English, Arabic, Swahili, and Finnish we have direct knowledge regarding the value of multilingualism, and its significance on social relations, learning and overall integration. We also consider ourselves proof that despite different religious views peaceful interactions based on mutual respect are achievable.

As an additional similarity, we are of the opinion that early childhood education holds the potential for not only creating awareness about diversity, but also to promote positive attitudes towards it. In support of this as a globally accepted view, Article 29 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children highlights the important role education is mandated with in supporting and guiding children towards responsible citizenship. The observance of peace, friendship and tolerance when living in societies that are composed of people from various nationalities, ethnicities and religions are emphasised as necessary attributes.

A reciprocal relationship is also emphasised by stating that education should also teach children to respect the values of the societies they live in, whilst respecting that of where others have come from. Acknowledging and valuing children's varied cultural heritages and languages is also part of the recommended educational package which also addresses the rights of the children of minority groups within the society. In Article 30, of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children a clear directive is given to respect the culture, language, and religion of children from minority groups.

The theoretical part of this thesis will highlight the justifications for intercultural learning, a process in which children, educators and parents play different roles. On the other hand, the methods and strategies that will be utilised in the functional part of this thesis will seek to demonstrate the opportunities that lie within early childhood educational environments to make forward and successful strides toward intercultural learning.

This functional thesis is based on our conviction that actions geared towards children are of significance because they do not only affect their present lives, but their future as well and therefore, as parents of children living amongst mixed cultures, we concur with the following statement.

“Teaching diversity is a difficult task because of the sensitivity of the topic. It is important to begin teaching children to love themselves at an early age because studies show that when people love themselves, they are less inclined to fear other people’s differences.”
Abdulantie. (2016, p. 5.)

2 Background information

2.1 Operational environment

This functional thesis is to be implemented within the context of Early childhood education and care in Finland. Early childhood education and care is considered as an important part of the comprehensive education system in Finland, since it lays the foundation for the long-term construction process of learning, growth, and development. Hence, Early childhood education quality affects human learning from childhood until adulthood. (Finnish National Agency of Education, n.d.)

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (n.d), Early childhood education services are provided in daycare centres, family daycares, clubs, playgrounds, and families homes. ECEC is additionally arranged by private service providers outsourced by the municipalities

Early childhood education and care in Finland is implemented and evaluated in accordance with the guidelines of the National Core Curriculum of ECEC (Finnish National Agency of Education, n.d.). The underlying values of the National Core Curriculum of ECEC are founded upon the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Act on ECEC and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (National Core Curriculum of ECEC, 2016, pp. 30-31).

2.2 The Finnish Core Curriculum of ECEC

The Finnish National Core Curriculum of ECEC (2016) aims to promote children's holistic growth and development. Children's interests, opinion and wellbeing are central factors in the curriculum. Children's learning process takes place in an operational environment which involves the children, guardians, and personnel. Pedagogical documentation is required in planning, implementing, and evaluating the groups' pedagogical activities, as well as each child's learning plan and progress.

This functional thesis draws its content from the National Core Curriculum of ECEC (2016), which places high emphasis on the Finnish societal values that include equality, equity and diversity. The underlying values of the National Core Curriculum encourages participation and inclusion for all children, regardless of their backgrounds. Intercultural

learning promotes equity and social justice in education. (Miller and Petriwskyj, 2013, p. 253.) Hence, there is a clear connection between intercultural learning and the values of the National Core Curriculum of ECEC.

There are five learning areas explained in the National Core Curriculum of ECEC (2016) that support the development of children's transversal competences. Intercultural learning can be related to the learning areas me and our community, rich world of languages and diverse forms of expression. Activities in this functional thesis will also support the development of children's transversal competences highlighted by the curriculum, namely cultural competence, interaction, and self-expression, thinking and learning and participation and involvement.

The learning area of me and my community aims to help children to understand the meaning of diversity in their local community (National Core Curriculum for ECEC, 2016, p. 69). Me and my community as a learning area supports the development of cultural competence as well as, interaction and self-expression. Cultural competences are emphasized in the National Core Curriculum of ECEC because children in Finland live in a diverse world, where social and interaction skills are required. "Good interaction with people with diverse cultural backgrounds and worldviews requires familiarity with and respect for one's own cultural background and worldview as well as those of others" (National Core Curriculum for ECEC 2016, p. 38).

The learning area rich world of languages is also related to this functional thesis, since it includes using books in different languages. Verbal incorporation of other languages will also be utilized in the activities. The National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2016, p. 64) describes this learning area as essential to the development of children's cultural skills and interaction. Early childhood educators have the task of promoting the development of children's Finnish language skills, in addition to supporting mother tongue languages. Early childhood educators are also required to arrange activities that will generate children's curiosity towards other different languages, texts, and cultures.

According to the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2016) pedagogical activities in ECEC should be planned to provide knowledge and understanding of different cultures, languages, religions, families amongst other things. As a result, children will be able to

develop flexibility and open-mindedness toward diversity. Additionally, their cultural identity and self-esteem will be strengthened.

The previously mentioned learning areas were taken into consideration and supported in the planning and implementation of this functional thesis.

Book and character bonding activities that were used in this functional thesis facilitated intercultural learning, in addition to developing children's skills connected to the diverse forms of expression as a learning area. Using drama, crafts, music, and play supports the development of children's diverse forms of expression competence. "ECEC is to support the development of children's different forms of expression. This will provide children with means to experience and perceive the world in a manner that speaks to and inspires them." (The National Core curriculum of ECEC, 2016, pp. 66-67.)

Through the use of diverse and multicultural children's literature, children's learning and thinking skills were supported, by presenting them with an opportunity to interact with different forms of diversity. According to the National Core curriculum of ECEC (2016, p. 37), children's learning and thinking skills helps children to establish a platform for the development of other skills and life-long learning, in addition to developing critical thinking.

This functional thesis was also targeted towards facilitating children's participation. During the dialogic reading sessions, children were encouraged to express their opinions, voice out their thoughts and to reflect upon various issues. "Active and responsible participation and involvement creates a foundation for a democratic and sustainable future. In addition to enhancing children's self-esteem, confidence and social skills." (The National Core curriculum of ECEC, 2016, p. 37.)

2.3 The need for intercultural learning based on statistics

Statistics gathered and provided by the City of Espoo (Jaatinen, Österholm & Puusniekka, 2019), were highly relevant to our developmental task because it is within this region that we implemented our activities. Results of the statistics shows that there are at least 119 different languages spoken by the residents of Espoo, with at least 43 of these having over 100 speakers.

According to the same report, Russian, Estonian, Albanian, Somali, English and Arabic had the highest number of speakers. The same report by Jaatinen, Österholm & Puusniekka (2019) also reflected that the number of foreign language speaking children between the age of 0-6 years was increasing whilst that of Finnish language speakers was decreasing.

These statistical findings highlight the highly multicultural and diverse nature of this region and additionally justifies the need to review educational strategies to ensure inclusive practices conducive for diversity awareness and cultural competences.

2.4 Espoo City's guidelines

Espoo City's local curriculum points out sustainable development, community and inclusion as valued principles which should be visible within the development of the operational culture. Empowering children is an essential part of positive pedagogy. Additionally, the appreciation of children and educators from diverse backgrounds is highly emphasized. (Opetus- ja varhaiskasvatuslautakunta: Espoo Kaupunki, 2019, p. 23.)

Dialogic reading as a method promotes a conversational culture with children. In practice, this means accommodating children's voices so that they can give their opinions and make valuable contributions. (Opetus- ja varhaiskasvatuslautakunta: Espoo Kaupunki, 2019, p. 36.) The role of different kinds of books and the use of dialogic reading is noted as one of the methods of promoting a conversational culture. A recommended course of action for educators is to, therefore, ensure the availability of a wider selection of books that cover various elements of diversity.

Cultural awareness and competence are important parts of sustainable development. Espoo City supports the recognition of cultural diversity from early stages and emphasizes the value of intercultural interactions for the purpose of strengthening children's own cultural identities and solidifying their value as members of the Finnish society. (Opetus- ja varhaiskasvatuslautakunta: Espoo Kaupunki, 2019, p. 40.) Based on this statement, intercultural learning is affirmed as a concept that should not be reserved for later stages in life.

Supporting intercultural learning entails planning and implementing activities based on knowledge regarding the variety of languages spoken within the operational environment. Languages and different cultures are viewed as valuable and enriching, as well as worthy of being made visible in the learning environment to enhance children's self-esteem and cultural identities. (Opetus- ja varhaiskasvatustalukunta: Espoo Kaupunki, 2019, p. 43.)

3 The thesis planning process

Having identified intercultural learning as a mutual topic of interest, we proceeded on to propose it to our working life partner Ullanmäen Päiväkoti in order to affirm its suitability. A central factor in our planning process was to familiarize ourselves with working life partner's needs. For that reason, we held a planning meeting with the educators and our discussion included an overview of the efficiency of methods already being used.

The information we gained from the planning meeting indicated that children's literature that was available in the daycare came from three sources. The main source was local libraries. Educators brought personal books to support topics being discussed in the daycare. Additionally, there were books that had been donated to the daycare by parents or other external sources.

Referring to library books as the main source, we sought to establish the daycare's borrowing practices and it emerged that children were encouraged to borrow books that interest them during trips to the local libraries, or from the library mobile bus. Educators guided the selection process and emphasis was also placed on selecting Finnish language books.

During our discussion educators reflected on their current and past literary selections and welcomed our idea to widen the scope of books being borrowed and used in the daycare, because there had been minimal use of diverse children's literature.

The language and culture teacher emphasized the need to enhance creativity in the pedagogical planning and implementation of activities to support language acquisition and cultural awareness. The daycare's special needs teacher on the other hand elaborated on the significance of a positive and inclusive pedagogy, and its effect on children's participation and overall learning.

In this daycare, small groups activities are often used, and have been observed to enhance concentration and the quality of the conversational culture. The central factors taken into consideration when planning small group activities are the children's developmental needs, as well as how the children can complement each other's learning based on their varied skills.

There are also groups specifically intended for children speaking Finnish as a second language, as well as groups with a combination of native speakers of Finnish and Finnish as a second language speakers. The common factor in most existing groups is that children are of different ages. However, there are activities planned for 5 to 6 years old separately.

To demonstrate the importance of utilizing educators' own diverse backgrounds, we explained that we would additionally incorporate our own cultural and linguistic elements in the implementation sessions. This approach was deemed as suitable, by the educators who felt that there was a need to find additional ways to support increased awareness of diversity in spite of the clear efforts they had made to acknowledge the various cultures in the groups. We therefore jointly agreed on dialogic reading of diverse children's literature coupled with book and character bonding activities as suitable methods.

Our next step was to identify sources from which we could increase the availability of multicultural and diverse children's literature in the daycare. The multilingual library in Pasila was suggested to us as a worthwhile place to search for literature and it proved to be a rewarding suggestion owing to its broad selection of books in different languages. We also borrowed books from other local libraries and identified more from our personal home selections. Our search for literature was mainly guided by the need to accommodate the various forms of diversity in the daycare. We also included other forms of diversity which we felt that children will benefit from learning about.

Planning for implementation time slots and days was made possible owing to flexibility on the part of the working life partner. We were provided with an outline of their schedules so that we could identify days when we wished to implement. As agreed, we informed our working life partner about the selected days of implementation in advance. We also agreed to utilize the small children's groups already in place at the daycare, to ensure an almost normal flow of activities at the daycare.

As an important part of our planning process, we drew up a guideline/checklist to assist us identify themes that emerged during the sessions. These themes had to be directly related to intercultural learning. This was important because we anticipated that dialogic reading could result in questions and comments from children that could stray outside the main theme and even though they would be addressed our evaluation needed to be confined to the main themes on the guideline/checklist. Refer to appendix 1 for the guideline/ checklist.

4 Thesis aims

The ability to respect different culture in order coexist peacefully may be mistakenly viewed as a complex issue beyond children's capability. There is a risk that intercultural learning can be regarded as a task intended for adults hence undermining children's active role in the process. It is, however, important to embrace a realistic perspective, because children interact with peers as well as adults from diverse backgrounds in their societies. A logical and much needed preparational approach would be, therefore, be to support children's comprehension of things they already see as well as those they are bound to encounter at some point in their lives.

A fitting description of the important role that children's literature plays is given by Brinson (2012, p. 30) stating that multicultural children's literature serves both as windows and mirrors, whereby, as mirrors, they reflect upon and reinforce the readers' culture and in contrast, as windows they provide an opening for opportunities to experience other people's cultures.

Educators' needs therefore to ask themselves whether" these mirrors and windows" exist in early childhood education environments. They also need to identify pedagogically suitable and creative ways to gauge and increase children's awareness of diversity.

Children's literature holds a unique potential for enhancing awareness. Careful and accommodative selection of literature must however be practised. Children's exposure to varied types of literature is influenced mostly by educators' decisions and their understanding of the educational wealth that lies within these books. Educators, therefore, need to review their bookshelves and reflect upon the variety of books they avail to the daycare.

In light of the previous statements, the aim of this functional thesis was to support intercultural learning in early childhood. This was achieved by utilising dialogic reading of multicultural and diverse children's literature through which children gained access to visual and audible representations of diversity.

We aimed to implement six dialogic reading sessions, using different books for each session. Themes that, directly and indirectly emerged from the dialogic reading sessions were discussed, taking into consideration children's interests and curiosity. Additionally, through scaffolding strategies, we aimed to enhance creativity, critical thinking as well as imaginative skills. Promoting the appreciation for differences and similarities that exist in the society was also an additional aim.

Play, drama, music, and crafts were used as book and character bonding activities in the sessions to complement the reading sessions. These activities provided gateways for children to express their thoughts and emotions regarding events described in the book.

As part of the process, when using dialogic reading to support intercultural learning in early childhood we conducted a detailed observation of how children responded to the use and availability of diverse children's literature. Areas of focus during the sessions were observable empathic skills, participation, empowerment as well as enhanced self-esteem.

5 The target groups

Our functional thesis focuses on children whose ages range from 4 to 6 years old. According to Eric Ericson's theory of psychological development (Erikson, 1980) children aged 4 to 6 combine two important psychological developmental stages, Initiative vs. Guilt and Industry vs. Inferiority.

Children aged 4 to 5 years old start to develop a sense of purpose and agency (Erikson, 1980, p. 78). Children in this age try to influence their surroundings through play and social interaction with others. Erikson argued that failure in this stage may lead to children being hesitant in achieving their present as well as future life goals and dreams. This is because their ability to be initiative and creative would be limited from childhood by guilt and fear. Erikson claims that children grow up into independent, goal-oriented,

creative, and daring people when they have been successful in finding a balance between initiative and guilt. Erikson (1980, p. 86) emphasized the important role of imagination and play in this stage.

Children need to be encouraged to practice their sense of authority and must be given the space to communicate their thoughts and ideas. Giving the child the space to participate during an activity is essential in facilitating the child's process of empowerment, which will eventually lead the child to become initiative, rather than passive. (Erikson, 1980, pp. 78-86.)

According to Erikson (1980, p. 87) children aged 6 are at the Industry vs. Inferiority stage and have the capacity to finish given tasks in real life and not just in role-playing. During this stage children aim to develop cultural skills and they enjoy the accomplishment. Erikson (1980, p. 93) mentions that children develop the first sense of division of labour and equality of opportunity at this age and begin to recognise human characteristics such as skin colour and parents' backgrounds.

An article Dosman, Andrews and Gouldenn (2012) describe children's cognitive, emotional, and social development during the ages from 0 to 5. The article states that children start to develop the theory of mind when they are four years old, giving them the ability to understand other people's perspective based on their beliefs, desires, and emotions.

Children aged 4 years old are also describes as negotiators who have developed a sense of problem-solving through dialogue and discussion. The importance of imaginary play in this stage is also explained as being a phase in which children begin to grasp morality and distinguish between right and wrong. (Dosman, Andrews and Gouldenn, 2012.)

These mentioned claims and theories concerning children aged 4 to 6, as applied to our target group, confirm that they have the cognitive and social-emotional skills that will enable them to understand diversity. It also implies that they are ready to listen, analyse, understand, and discuss. In addition to this, imaginary play and story-based drama can foster the understanding of different cultures and viewpoints which encourage discussion, active interaction, and participation.

6 Theoretical framework

6.1 Intercultural learning

The Council of Europe's training kit (T-Kit) describes intercultural learning as an educational approach that aims to develop individuals' willingness and abilities to live together in diverse societies. This approach encourages perspectives in which diversity is valued, and not perceived as an obstacle that causes exclusion. (Sandu and Lyamouri-Bajja, 2018, p.21.)

Valuing diversity is considered as one of the main aspects of a coherent approach to intercultural learning, in addition to multiperspectivity, equal opportunities, social transformation and educational approach (Sandu and Lyamouri-Bajja, 2018, p. 23).

Because intercultural learning is transversal, it promotes an active learning environment that includes different types of learning and social relations. Intercultural learning is not merely about acknowledging certain groups or cultures, but rather it also enhances competences that enable learners to live in societies where participation is possible. This is done regardless of their religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability as well as their cultural or socio-economic backgrounds. (Sandu and Lyamouri-Bajja, 2018, pp. 33-34.)

Intercultural learning might be perceived as a limited learning process in which only knowledge about different cultures is provided. However, the literature findings mentioned above demonstrate that intercultural learning is not exclusively about studying cultural differences. Intercultural learning goes deeper into trying to understand different forms of diversity in the society as a part of the whole world.

Diversity awareness includes many different aspects. This functional thesis takes into consideration some dimensions of human diversity. "The human dimensions of diversity includes age, cultural identity, gender identity or expression, nationality, physical and mental ability, political and ideological perspectives, racial and ethnic identity, religious and spiritual identity, sexual orientation, and social and economic status" (Stanley, 2011, p. 522).

Intercultural learning also emphasizes the importance of strengthening one's own cultural identity by reinforcing personal cultural backgrounds and aligning it with the other

people's culture. As a result, a strong cultural background is created, as well as open-mindedness toward others. (Spulber, 2018, p. 78.)

In connection with our functional thesis idea, AFS (2017) states that intercultural learning is essential in the early years because intercultural learning teaches children about empathy, open-mindedness, and flexibility. Consequently, intercultural learning prepares children to live in a diverse world that respects differences.

6.2 Intercultural learning and social pedagogy

Intercultural learning is linked to some social pedagogical concepts that promote children's well-being, such as empowerment, participation, and empathy. This section will present literature findings that will clarify the connection between intercultural learning and these concepts.

To explore the connection between empowering children and intercultural learning, this paper will refer to definition of empowerment from a cultural angle by Stromquist (1993, pp. 259-266) which states that "cultural empowerment is the redefining of rules and norms and the recreating of cultural and symbolic practices. This may involve focusing on minority rights by using culture as an entry point".

The link between intercultural learning and empowerment can be seen clearly here since intercultural learning is considered as a learning method that uses cross-cultural activities to engage children in self-acceptance while appreciating others' uniqueness. This boosts children's self-esteem and cultural identity. As a result, both native and non-native children are empowered.

In another research Datta (2017), discusses the importance of intercultural activities in facilitating the empowerment of the disadvantaged from different cultural backgrounds and age groups. Datta claims that the intercultural activities that he implemented in Canada's community garden provided a safe cross-cultural learning space for the children, in which they exchanged knowledge about different cultures and understood the concept of diversity.

Regarding the connection between intercultural learning and participation, this paper refers to a statement made by The Council of Europe's training kit (T-Kit) indicating that intercultural learning provides an equality of opportunities to voice up thoughts and opinions, which promotes active participation for everyone (Sandu and Lyamouri-Bajja, 2018, p. 22).

Children's participation is an essential goal in ECEC. According to Vinninen, et al. (2013, p. 211) supporting children's participation is essential because it increases their self-esteem and sense of autonomy. Vinninen, et al. (2013, p. 212) regard the process of children participating as "an activity of interpreting the world with adults who respect and listen to children and are interested in their affairs".

Based on these findings a clear connection between intercultural learning and children participation is demonstrated.

In this theoretical framework, the connection between empathy and intercultural learning is also examined. According to (Broome, 2017), empathy allows us to achieve meaningful human interaction and allows us to engage in tasks that require coordination between stepping outside the boundaries of one's own awareness and imaginatively entering the world of another person.

Broome (2017) argues that empathy is a key skill in performing active intercultural communication. "In intercultural empathy, understanding is not viewed as a product, but as an ongoing process occurring between communicators. It is created during the interaction, emerging as we listen to one another respectfully and engage in a mutual process of exploring and learning together." (Broome, 2017, p. 1.)

These literature findings suggest that intercultural learning and empathy are intertwined. Intercultural learning enhances children's empathic skills, enabling them to listen, understand and empathise with children from other cultures.

6.3 Educators' roles in supporting intercultural learning

Early childhood educators are in a unique and privileged position to support intercultural learning from early years. This role is more so significant in early childhood education

centers with children and staff from diverse backgrounds. This section highlights the embedded roles that educators play when using dialogic reading of diverse children's literature to support intercultural learning.

By choosing to utilize dialogic reading with children, educators play an important role in cultivating the additional benefits reading provides with regards to language development. According to Lennox (2013, p .381) language enables children to express emotions and share their views and ideas. Through communication, language also helps children establish their identity and understand others. In further elaboration of the benefits derived from interactive reading, Lennox (2013, p .387) cites a broadened vocabulary, increased conceptual knowledge, enhanced cognitive development through discussions, and a higher order of thinking skills as positive outcomes. As an addition to all these benefits, diverse children's literature broadens the angles of developing these skills.

Educators play an important role in scratching beyond surface levels in pursuit for understanding. Abdulatie (2016, p. 9) suggests that educators should make use of daily situations as learning opportunities. Educators need to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves every day to explain different issues to children because their curiosity is a way of understanding the how's and why's of the world. Additionally, through play, exploration and evaluation facilitated by stimulating environments for social interactions, they learn about people's desires, preferences, beliefs and emotions.

Educators open doors for a variety of languages. In ECEC, Mother tongue languages are valued and educators who share common languages with the children are encouraged to utilize them through foreign language words, greetings as well as music. In addition to this, a directive is given to borrow foreign language books for use in daycares. (Opetus- ja varhaiskasvatuslautakunta: Espoo Kaupunki, 2019, p. 43.)

According to Austin (2015, p. 32), knowledge and respect for other cultures and languages is demonstrated by educators availing culturally and linguistically responsive literature that will promote reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. By doing this, educators perform an equally important role of fostering respectful and inclusive practices in addition to valuing multilingualism.

Educators actions “speak a thousand words” to children. According to Abdulatie (2016, p. 9) children learn by observing the actions of not only their parents, but also others around them, including caregivers. This statement suggests that quite often children tend to mirror what they see and hear, acting upon information they gain from their respective homes and societies. Based on their observations, it is not uncommon for children to voice out amusing, challenging, unexpected or difficult questions and comments. An imperative role for educators when supporting intercultural learning in early childhood is to role model positive, empathetic, honest, and supportive attitudes.

Lennox (2013, p. 383) states that teachers have an influential role in choosing books effective for interactive reading out loud sessions and recommends availing to children a variety of well-illustrated, quality literature inclusive of fiction, poetry and information books. In this regard, educators play the role of ensuring quality in learning. Careful planning and checking in advance the suitability of the literature to achieve desired aims is necessary in ensuring quality and successful dialogic reading sessions.

Weighing upon these statements, we concur that a conversational culture driven by genuine appreciation for dialogic reading is a stable platform upon which knowledge can be gained and exchanged between people from diverse backgrounds. The methods we shall utilize in the functional part of this thesis will support these views.

7 The chosen methods and materials

This section will expound on dialogic reading and book and character bonding activities as methods to facilitate intercultural understanding.

7.1 Dialogic reading

In their research about how dialogic reading intervention improves kindergartners’ oral narrative construction, Lever and Sénéchal (2011) define dialogic reading as a teaching technique that includes creating an active interaction between the adult and the child while reading a story. This interaction is constructed through continuous dialogue between the adult and the child. “Parents may ask and answer questions during shared reading, thereby creating a dialogic environment that contains many opportunities for adults to scaffold narrative elements in a manner similar to adult-child dialogues about past events “ (Lever and Sénéchal, 2011, p. 3).

In order to generate interaction during dialogic reading, the teacher is required to ask the children (wh-) or open-ended questions. According to Lever and Senecha (2011), this kind of interaction emphasizes what has been told in the story and enhances the child's understanding regarding the connection between elements represented in the text and the pictures. As a result, dialogic reading improves children's narrative oral skills, narrative construction skills and literacy skills. As a result, children who participate in dialogic reading are able to describe the mental and emotional state of the story's character more than the children who participate in normal reading circles.

The connection between dialogic reading and intercultural learning was explored by Heggernes (2019) stating that dialogic activities can promote intercultural learning when elements of the participants' cultures are incorporated in these activities. Consequently, children will learn about their own culture and other children's' cultures.

Heggernes (2019) also describes literature and fiction as important mediums for fostering intercultural learning through which students can encounter conflicting perspectives. These conflicting encounters can promote intercultural learning if the teacher has the required intercultural competence to support the learning process.

Heggernes (2019) claims that books containing a lot of pictures engage readers with the semiotic meaning of the picture-text relationship, which opens the door for additional dialogic analysis of different potential scenarios in relation to the narrative.

7.2 Book and character bonding activities

Klefstad & Martinez (2013) discuss the use of book and character bonding activities in combination with multicultural children's books for the purpose of enhancing awareness and appreciation of other cultures. Klefstad & Martinez used this method in the Midwestern United States where the number of minority groups was increasing.

Klefstad & Martinez (2013) describe book and character bonding activities as methods that helps children deepen their understanding of the storybook's character, since it helps children to form an attachment with the character of the story. Consequently, connecting with the character's experiences, thoughts, and emotions.

Book and character bonding activities can include drama, free play, music, art, and crafts among other activities. The educator plans activities based on the learning theme, the character of the book and children's skills.

Book and character bonding activities are performed before, within or after the reading session. Thus, it is either used to pave the way to the reading session or to strengthen the knowledge gained from the reading session.

Based on this article, it can be concluded that the book and character bonding method is related to dialogic reading, since both methods encourage active discussion and children's participation during the reading process. Building upon these existing strategies this functional thesis, therefore, incorporated dialogic reading of children's literature as a unique approach.

7.3 Defining diverse and multicultural children's literature

Bishop 1997 (as cited in Garrison, 2012, p. 15) defines multicultural literature as "books that reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity". Using multicultural literature in a multicultural daycare is important, however, based on this definition we recognised the need for a more accommodative selection of literature. This is because It is important for the purpose of intercultural learning to support children's understanding of other issues outside race and ethnicity. To serve this purpose we, therefore, refer to and recommend the additional use of diverse children's literature.

According to Thomas (2016), diverse children's literature covers much more than what multicultural literature was initially intended for, because it addresses a wider range of diversity, such as culture, languages, sexual orientation, disabilities, gender, and religion. Considering our aims, diverse children's literature was therefore a more relevant and accommodative category.

Based on these literature definitions and comparisons, we propose that intercultural learning would be best achieved when utilizing books from both categories.

8 Methodology for data collection

This functional thesis focused on the utilisation of dialogic reading sessions and book and character bonding activities in a daycare setting to promote intercultural learning.

Because the implementation sessions took place in an environment which was familiar to the children who were the main participants, observation and note-taking were utilised for collecting data.

The collection of data through observation is a method usually used in social science and it focuses on reactions, behaviours and emotions of the participants in their natural setting (Ciesielska, et al, 2018, p. 33). There are several types of observations, and the specific one that we used was participant observation.

Participant observation is defined as “an observation process, in which the observer is expected to become a part of the group being studied to the extent that the members themselves include the observer in the activity and turn to the observer for information about how the group is operating” (Kawulich, 2005, p. 4).

Denscombe (2014, pp. 215-216) states that when participating as an observer, details and events that are of interest in the natural setting of the activity will be directly experienced. This provides an insider’s perspective into situations from which insight is gained regarding cultures, beliefs, and lifestyles.

Participant observation corresponded with the nature of our activities because they took place in the children day care, ensuring familiarity and normalcy. Because the sessions were mostly incorporated into the daycare’s daily schedules, there was also minimal disruption to their ongoing activities.

Children were active participants during the implementation sessions, from whom we received immense verbal responses. They also vividly displayed reactions and emotions that were important as part of the data collected. Additionally, feedback received from educators was also significant in our overall analyses.

Denscombe (2014, p. 217) recommends writing notes related to the session soon after it ends. In our roles as participating observers, it was important to maintain continuity

during sessions and therefore we compiled our notes after the sessions. Note-taking was also utilised for data collection before and after the activities to collect information and feedback from the personnel.

Denscombe (2014, p. 243) explains that analysis is done in order to widen comprehension about something. Analysis therefore requires in-depth examination, description, and explanations. When analysing text and talk, Denscombe (2014, p. 281) suggests that there may be a need to look beyond the surface level in search of concealed meanings within words. As an example, some of the phrases and responses children gave were indicative of their religious affiliations, cultural traditions, and life situations.

When evaluating our data, we had to be alert to the fact that our personal views and familiarity with the topics being discussed may affect the evaluation process. We, therefore, used critical reflection using a pre-planned checklist as a guideline to identify and avoid bias. The same guideline also ensured that we did not stray from the main themes and topics we had identified as relevant. In addition to this, it was an important part of our evaluation to identify issues or topics with the potential for further development and research. The referred to guideline and checklist can be seen in appendix 1.

9 Ethical considerations

According to the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK (2019, pp. 49-68), the ethical principles of research in the humanities and social and behavioural sciences consist of respecting the dignity and autonomy of the research subjects. Protecting privacy and data, respecting heritage and biodiversity as well as avoiding significant risk, damage or harm to participants are also ethical measures.

The first and very important step we took was to apply for a research permit, which is mandatory according to the regulations laid down by the city of Espoo. The research permit was granted. We had also been granted a permission to conduct activities on the daycare by its director.

According to TENK (2019, p. 52), parents and guardians of minors should be informed about research involving children. Equally, children should also be allowed to influence matters concerning them. Therefore, children as participants were informed about the task and their rights to be heard during implementation.

With minors as the target group of our functional thesis, it was mandatory to obtain consent from their parents and guardians (refer to appendix 2).

According to TENK (2019, p. 54), the evaluation of possible risks to participants as well as others is explained to be an important part of the planning process, and this responsibility is held by the researcher from the start till the end of the research. In view of this, even though we had obtained preliminary information and advice regarding factors to bear in mind when implementing the activities during the planning process, we were constantly alert to any additional potential risks that may arise to participants, as our responsibility throughout the process.

Avoiding harm to participants was also ensured by modelling and emphasising respect for others as well as having clear guidelines and rules for the implementation sessions. Moreover, while aiming for enhanced participation by engaging children's comments and questions, we were aware that both positive and negative feelings may arise from the sessions. As a humane approach, we accommodated these feelings as part of the learning process and guided children into channeling negative feelings towards more positive ones.

The importance of researchers familiarising themselves with participants and their community is explained by TENK (2019, p. 51), as being necessary for the avoidance of harm to participants. Research that deals with human participants is also described as a process that requires trust and the upholding of human dignity, with respect to their rights.

Prior to embarking upon the implementation part of the development task, we familiarised ourselves with the regulations and expectations of our working life partner. As a result, we agreed on the need to adhere to their schedules, hence implementing our sessions as part of their daily activities to minimize disruptions. We also took into consideration the information we have received beforehand, regarding children's individual needs.

TENK (2019, p. 51), states that “not only do participants have the right to cease their participation at any stage of their choosing, but that it should not result in any negative consequences to them”. In accordance with this guideline, and observance of the principle of autonomy.

Even though the activities were implemented as part of daily routines that children were accustomed to, participants still had the right to withdraw from activities at any stage. Our priority task as a boundary was, therefore, to motivate children into participating, and support a willingness to continue.

Finally, as an ethical and protective measure, confidentiality was observed. Measures were taken to ensure that data collected, inclusive of photos did not reveal the identity of the participants. Sensitive information that came up during session was excluded from our data.

10 The thesis plan implementation process

The functional part of this thesis was implemented at Ullämaen daycare. Our original plan had been to implement six dialogic reading sessions, each with its own book and character bonding activity intended to deepen children's understanding and conceptualisation of the discussed themes. The original implementation timeframe was supposed to be a two weeks period.

Due to an ongoing pandemic resulting in the closure of the daycare, we implemented four dialogic reading sessions, three of which included a book and character bonding activity in the span of a week. Our plan to hold a dialogic reading session in Albanian and Finnish language in cooperation with a parent was also not realized but remains as a future possibility. Despite this setback, we maintained our resolve to find a way of covering the planned themes and therefore decided to include descriptive plans for unimplemented activities with the hope that they could be implemented in the future.

The first and very important step of our implementation process was to avail diverse children's literature to the daycare, which included many other books besides those we had selected for use in the dialogic reading sessions. Fairy tales, fictional, and informational books were the main categories, however, the books covered various topics, and represented different forms of diversity. The books were strategically placed in areas that were visible and accessible to all. Refer to appendix 3 (5).

10.1 Implemented activities

10.1.1 The first session: My veil, my culture

Activity structure	Small groups activity. 35 minutes per group. Different age participants. 1 reader in Arabic and 1 translator to Finnish. Participants are encouraged explore and ask questions.
Learning areas as per the curriculum	Me and our community, rich word of languages
Transversal competences as per the curriculum	Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression, thinking and learning, participation and involvement.
Objectives of the activity for children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To promote diversity awareness in the context of other religions. -To enhance critical thinking and imagination skills. - To connect with the story through play as a book bonding activity. -To promote children's participation, exploring new language (Arabic). 	

Session aims

According to the National Core Curriculum of ECEC, "Children are encouraged to get to know other people, languages, and cultures to develop children's cultural competence as well as their interaction and self-expression skills " (2016, p. 38).

Some of the Muslim women living in Finland wear a Hijab which is a piece of cloth used to cover their hair when they are outdoors. Other Muslim women wear a Niqab, which is a piece of cloth they use to cover their face, except for the eyes. (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)

This dressing tradition might be perceived negatively if its purpose is not understood correctly. Therefore, the aim of this session was to investigate children's perceptions and curiosity regarding women with Hijab and Niqab that they may have encountered in their

community. In addition to promote awareness regarding culture and religion as reflected through dressing costumes. Arabic language was also presented to the children to explore a different type of alphabets.

“Intercultural learning has most recently focused more on combating Islamophobia and bringing together young Muslims and non-Muslims. Intercultural learning has a role to play in providing learners with critical thinking skills, to deconstruct biased images provided by mainstream media or public discourse.” (Sandu and Lyamouri-Bajja, 2018, p. 11.)

Reactions to things we see but do not fully understand

As an introduction and to capture children’s interest, children were shown pictures of women wearing Hijabs and Niqab and asked them to describe what came to their minds. Several descriptions followed, such as scary, strange, angry, and a mother. Most felt that they looked like ninjas. The children additionally commented on having seen ladies wearing Hijabs or Niqabs in their communities, at shopping malls, on the train and while at the bus stops. They had also noted that Hijabs were worn by people from different racial backgrounds. Several of them believed that these women dressed this way because of baldness, shyness, feeling cold or unwell. The children also questioned the suitability of this kind of dressing during harsh winters.

A ninja’s superpower

Our next aim was to create awareness based on comments previously made by the children to promote positive attitudes towards different cultures in addition to highlighting and correcting misconceptions.

Building upon the Ninja description we encouraged them to share views about ninjas, and they were described as protective and highly skilled characters. It was obvious that the currently popular game of Ninjago greatly contributed to their vivid imagination of all that ninjas can do. The children were very curious about how people eat, do physical activity, and play dress up when dressed in these outfits. This demonstrated that children are trying to connect other people’s cultures and activities with their own.

My veil, my culture, my religion

The children were informed that women in different cultures cover their hair for different reasons, but Hijabs and Niqabs are associated with the Muslim religion, which is practised in many countries. Children were also informed, that not all women in Muslim countries wear Hijabs or Niqabs. At the mention of Islam, a child in the group excitedly tried to tell the others about the knowledge he had regarding what Islam is saying, "I know what it is, it's at our home!" Later into the session, children began to realise that hijabs are not an unfamiliar concept at all, because they had indeed seen some day care parents, educators as well as neighbours at home using them. One child then commented, "it's not scary, it's just someone's mom under the clothes!".

The magical socks

Proceeding into the dialogic reading session, Mina read a book in Arabic language and I translated it to the children in Finnish. The book, "My Mother's Magical Socks" narrates about a mother, who wears a Niqab and uses specific types of socks for each day of the week and consequently, her child learns to figure out what day of the week it is by checking on her mommy's socks.

The wonders of Arabic

At this point of the session, our aim was to highlight differences as well as similarities. We did this by drawing children's attention towards the uniqueness of the Arabic alphabet in addition to the fact that in Arabic books are read from the right to left.

Children were both amazed and amused by the Arabic language and letters, as well as the book being read from right to left as done in the Arabic language. As a result of the translation, a child commented excitedly "Am beginning to understand Arabic!" and another noted in amazement "their alphabet looks like hooks and sticks!" The children were very keen to have their names written in Arabic and found it amazing that the same thing can be done differently in another culture.

Who is under the blanket?

It is worth mentioning that play activities are supported by the National Core Curriculum of ECEC. “While children learn by playing, they do not personally see play as a vehicle for learning but a way of spending time, living, and perceiving the world instead.” (National Core Curriculum of ECEC, 2016, p. 61.)

A game we named “guess who is under the blanket” was used as a book and character bonding activity. The general idea was to figure out who was under the blanket based on the visible socks. To enrich the game different languages were used to describe colours and patterns on the socks. The children really enjoyed this guessing game and were motivated to think of various ways to modify the game and make guessing more challenging.

Session Reflection

Dialogic reading paved the way for creating awareness about a relevant and important cultural and religious tradition which children had observed but had not previously had a chance to discuss. The importance of utilising someone with direct knowledge and experience in a particular topic was observed because children's questions and opinions could be addressed with surety of authentic answers and information.

Additionally, a foreign language was successfully explored and using two languages within the sessions enriched the process. Moreover, illustrations in the picture book aided children to correctly figure out some things being read out in Arabic, lessening the need for translation.

“Bringing” this dressing custom into the learning environment using pictures, directly provided a chance for children to engage their imaginative skills. They were also able to voice out their opinions and accommodating their responses with a positive and non-judgmental attitude, enabled the correction of misconceptions.

Different worldviews are acknowledged as important parts of identity within ECEC. The National Core Curriculum of ECEC (2016, p. 70) states that both irreligion and various worldviews present in children groups should be investigated to promote mutual respect and understanding. Religion as part of identity was welcomed into the session, giving

children to whom it was relevant the opportunity to air their views. Participation was enhanced using play, experimenting with foreign letters to write participants' names, and presenting this important topic in an age-appropriate and interesting manner.

10.1.2 The second session: Friendship without boundaries

Activity structure	Maximum 40 minutes circle time activity- with maximum ten different age participants. One reader in English and a child translating to Finnish. Participants are encouraged to respond in Finnish and English.
Learning area	Me and our community, rich world of languages, diverse forms of expression.
Transversal competences	cultural competences Interaction, and self-expression, participation and involvement, thinking and learning.
<p>Objectives of the activity for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To create awareness about disability in the context of diversity - To enhance children's participation via contributions and activities- to promote social, emotional and skills- by discussing peer relationships. - To explore the simultaneous use of English and Finnish. - To support ethical thinking and empathy skills by discussing different experiences and situations- to utilise music as a form of expression. 	

Session aims

Intercultural learning takes a strong stand against discrimination and advocates for protecting the human rights of the disadvantaged groups (Sandu and Lyamouri-Bajja, 2018, p. 13). A disabled person may face intersectional discrimination because of disability and other factors such as gender or cultural background. Intercultural learning challenges and rejects this kind of discrimination. (Sandu and Lyamouri-Bajja, 2018, p. 24.)

This aim of this session was to support intercultural learning by creating awareness about disability as a part of diversity. We also aimed to support peer relations, social, emotional, and empathic skills. As it was discussed before in this paper, intercultural

learning aims to develop competences that help children to live in a peaceful and diverse world that appreciate everyone's differences. "Intercultural learning leads the development of a set of attitudes, knowledge and skills that help young people to understand themselves and others, and to understand diversity" (Sandu and Lyamouri-Bajja, 2018, p. 38).

Introducing the Finnish English session

The book "Amazing" by Steve Antony is about a disabled child and his exciting experiences with his pet dragon. In this session, the approach used was meant to celebrate bilingualism as a part of identity. A bilingual child was given the lead role to translate to others into Finnish what had been read in English, a role she took great pride in and executed very well. By using this approach a few other children also began to utilize their English-speaking skills when responding and asking questions.

Different types of friends

Children investigated the cover of the book, and noted that there were people of different ages, gender, and race. They also noted the boy on a wheelchair and the tiny dragon. Through dialogic reading the main questions children were asked were: Where do you think they are going? Are they friends? What game do you think they will play? An interesting and surprising outcome was that one child's opinion was that playing together was not advisable because one of them was in a wheelchair.

A daycare fit for all

Dialogic reading can be used to enhance ethical thinking skills, which in turn promotes a safe and inclusive atmosphere. The National Core Curriculum of ECEC (2016, p. 69) states that reflection on different situations and questions supports children's awareness about social relations, moral choices, fears, justice as well as emotions

The group was asked to imagine that a child in a wheelchair had joined the daycare, and to consider whether they would play with him. Most of the children said yes, a few were unsure, and the same child declined. A surprising explanation, however, followed because it emerged that the child was simply concerned that the boy in the wheelchair could accidentally get hurt, worsening his condition. This provided an opportunity to discuss the feeling of being left out and other emotions. From these children learnt that

in the process of trying to protect, they may socially exclude their peers. The children were then prompted to state how they could make the place safer for everyone.

Different kind of feelings

A birthday party scene described in the book, was a familiar and popular scenario for the children to relate to. It enabled discussions about various emotions such as excitement, frustration, upset and shame. Accidental mistakes, apologising and seeing the good in others also came up as topics that children were able to identify with as part of their everyday experiences.

The more we play together, the happier we will be!

The use of music is emphasized in the National Core Curriculum of ECEC when planning and implementing pedagogical activities. "Children are encouraged to use their imagination and express their thoughts and emotions stirred by music, for example by explaining them verbally" (The National Core Curriculum of ECEC, 2016, p. 68).

A song was used as a book and character bonding activity, and the wordings were changed to describe the various things the children felt the book character does with his pet dragon. It was clear that children suggested activities which they themselves enjoyed in real life. Playing with words combined with humour enhanced participation. Children were also asked to name unique and positive things about their peers, in addition to identifying differences and similarities amongst them and were given an opportunity to choose a pair play partner based on these factors. Refer to appendix 3 (2) for the song.

Session reflection

Intercultural learning in this session was supported by bringing up a topic concerning a form of diversity not directly represented in the daycare, but about which most children were familiar with. It emerged that children also had varied perspectives about disability. Perspectives on inclusive peer relationships were supported by discussing aspects that may erect boundaries within social relations

Utilizing bilingualism by concurrently using Finnish and English triggered curiosity that resulted in motivation for participation. It also opened a window of opportunity for others to engage their linguistic skills. Children demonstrated patience and admiration towards

bilingual speakers. The story, supported by illustrations enabled children to identify with various feelings they had also felt, even though sometimes under different circumstances.

Respect for different perspectives was supported by accommodating everyone's views. Understanding was fostered by allowing for explanations and dialogue emerged as a by-product of intercultural learning. Cultivating upon empathy, learning was supported by explaining the value of inclusive attitudes and practices. Problem-solving and imaginative skills were supported by creating an imaginary scenario in which children managed to suggest positive and inclusive practices towards their peers.

10.1.3 The third session: A grandmother just like mine!

Activity structure	Introduction. Dialogic reading, (Reading in English/ other languages to be utilised). Free / Role play (35 minutes/activity). Final reflection / feedback.
Learning areas as per the curriculum	Me and our community, rich world of languages, diverse forms of expression and I grow move and develop.
Transversal competences as per the curriculum	Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression, participation, and involvement, thinking and learning.
<p>Objectives of the activity for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To support and enhance participation through free play and drama as a joint activity. -To support thinking and learning using reflection, questions and prompting. - To facilitate comparison of cultural practices leading to cultural competence. - To support Finnish language learning- -To promote physical activity and movement within the session. - To support appreciation of the elderly as part of the community. 	

Session aims

Ageing is a natural process in life, and when defining diversity, age is an important part of it. The relevance of this topic in Finland is based on a statement by the Finnish Institution of Health and Welfare (2020) declaring Finland as being one of the oldest populations in Europe, made up of four concurrent generations. Based on this information, it

can be deduced that children have a high probability of interacting with elderly members of the society.

This dialogic reading session aimed to promote positive attitudes towards ageing, by focusing on an elderly story character. In addition to this, we aimed to promote cultural identity by using books that presented a traditional fairy-tale character in an entirely different way. The different activities were planned with the additional aim of triggering children's imaginative skills.

The used books combination

The little red riding hood is a familiar and popular story for most children, which has been translated into many languages increasing the probability that a child may have heard the story at some point. For this dialogic reading session, we used three different books. The books "Little Red Riding Hood" by Sterling publishers, and "Not Again Red Riding Hood!" by Kate Clynes and Louise Daykin had pictures of the characters with different skin colours, suggesting different races. This was a very important factor for us because children could visualise the main characters in different ways and attach various cultural elements to them. The third book used was "Tacabka Xilliga Guga" (The harvest season) by Dr.Mohamud M. Dirios which had both Somali and English text.

Brand new red riding hood

This dialogic reading session had a nice flow to it, owing to the familiarity of the story and intercultural learning was supported by prompting children to imagine what countries the two, differently portrayed characters were from. They were also invited to imagine the characters, age, hobbies, likes and dislikes, languages as well as food preferences. Providing the character of the book with elements from children's personal lives was enjoyable for all, and an inclusive experience since there were no limitations to who red riding hood could be.

Precious grandparents

The grandmother character in the story made it possible to discuss grandparents. All participants had previously interacted with the elderly, and for most children, it was with their own grandparents whom they talked about eagerly.

Children were prompted to reflect on their experiences with the elderly, and whilst doing so positive and caring attitudes were emphasised. They were told about the Kenyan culture, whereby the elderly people are respected and viewed as wise by the majority. In addition to this, family and relatives take great pride in having the responsibility of taking care of their elderly.

Play as a book and character activities

Adult scaffolding promotes dialogue and children's participation. Elkoinen (2005 Cited in Bodrova, 2008, P. 366) describes the process of creating the imaginary scenario as an active interaction between the teacher and the children. The teacher encourages children's participation by asking them what roles they want to play.

Play was used as a book and character bonding activity in this session with children. During play, the children eagerly contributed towards preparing a food basket for the grandmother character. The book about Somali food tradition was effective in enhancing their imagination, making it possible to name different foods from different cultures, while adding them into the basket. Children derived additional motivation from the fact that the adult also playfully added and explained Swahili words such as Nyama (Meat), viazi (Potatoes) into the basket. As a result, the children did the same, in various languages. Drama as a book and character bonding activity.

The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky introduced dramatic or make-believe play as learning methods that have been widely used with young children. Vygotsky (1978 cited in Bodrova, 2008, p.360) claims that dramatic role play has educational benefits for young children that includes the formation of the child's Zone of Proximal development. Vygotsky states "In play the child is always behaving beyond his age, above his usual everyday behavior. Play contains in a concentrated form, as in the focus of a magnifying glass, all developmental tendencies; it is as if the child tries to jump above his usual level".

In this session, children re-enacted the story of little red riding hood through their different roles. An adult acting as the wolf enriched the drama session. Most children looked forward to this exciting part of the story and wanted to dramatize the same role. Additionally, the children used soft toys to build a model home for Little red riding hood and created a tunnel pathway leading up to the grandmother character's house which they enjoyed

crawling through. A higher order of thinking was demonstrated by children “hoping that the adult wolf wouldn't be able to fit and crawl through”. A playing shade was used to create the grandmother's house.

Discussing different fears and emotions

The previous scene, however, was uncomfortable for one child who is very close to the grandmother and found it scary to imagine that a wolf could eat her up, despite being imaginative play. In the process of supporting Intercultural learning it was important to take all views and emotions into consideration, and where applicable take up necessary action. Because the child was negatively affected by what everyone else was enjoying, it was an opportunity to enhance empathic skills, in the process of calming the child.

An additional spontaneous book and character bonding activity resulted from this and during circle time we discussed different fears and how to deal with them. Hand puppets were used by the children when giving advice and solutions. One of the children advised the child to calm down the wolf by telling it Alhamdulillah, which is an Arabic phrase that means "praise be to God", or "thank God". This phrase also may be an expression of relief (Urban Dictionary, 2017). Children were empathetic and found other creative ways to encourage the child, which helped. The same child also suggested the use of a night lamp or torch as a solution to an adult who cited the fear of darkness.

Session reflection

Observations from this session demonstrated how diverse children's literature, with characters depicting different races, makes it possible for children to visualise and engage their imaginative and creative skills differently. We observed that presenting the character this way made them more familiar and easier to connect with.

Additionally, this dialogic reading session moved away from the common practice of using only one book and found its uniqueness in using three books. However, utilising these books for different purposes and at different intervals demonstrated the need for careful selection, planning and improvisation. For the children, it facilitated a wider range of comments and questions translating to increased participation.

Based on children's comments about their grandparents, it was evident that there were already positive attitudes towards them, however, as a general aim, we managed to emphasize the need to not limit these positive and caring attitudes to family members but to the elderly in the society in general.

The important role that the adult plays in enriching play, and effectively enhancing the zone of proximal development was also observed. Positive attitudes were promoted by acknowledging children's views about their grandparents. Finnish language was supported, not only by reading in Finnish, but by using other languages as well and exploring Finnish translations.

Our assumption and expectation had been that all children would enjoy this experience, however, this was not the case. Addressing a child's concern resulted in many other positive outcomes such as engaging empathy, and problem-solving skills. Children additionally experienced a sense of empowerment stemming from this situation whereby they needed to "assist" their groupmate.

The assumption and expectation had been that all children would enjoy this experience, however, this was not the case and by addressing an issue raised by one child resulted in many other positive outcomes such as engaging empathy, and problem-solving skills. Children experienced empowerment stemming from this situation whereby they needed to "assist" their groupmate. Based on children's comments about their grandparents, it was evident that there were already positive attitudes towards them, however, as a general aim, we managed to emphasise the need to not limit these positive and caring attitudes to family members but to the elderly in the society in general.

Finally, this session also demonstrated the numerous opportunities that exist for educators to support intercultural learning by zooming in on familiar and easily comprehensible topics, regarding different forms of diversity.

10.1.4 The fourth session: Same kind of different

Activity structure	Brief introduction. Dialogic reading 30 minutes (English text read out in Finnish). Extended activities (30-45 minutes). Final reflection/ feedback.
Learning area	Me and our community, rich word of languages and divers form of expression
Transversal competences	cultural competences, interaction and self-expression, participation and involvement, thinking and learning.
<p>Objectives of the activity for children</p> <p>To enhance cultural competence by discussing different types of families as part of diversity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To promote participation by accommodating everyone's views and contributions - To strengthen Finnish language skills using Finnish literature - To support a connection with the story using crafts as a book bonding activity - To support visual expression and fine motor skills through crafts- to enhance self-esteem and identity role modelling appreciation of self and others. 	

Session aims

Harper & Brand (2010) state that exposure to enriching diverse children's literature fosters a greater understanding of themselves as well as that of others, by examining experiences, similarities, and differences which they learn to value.

The aim of this session was to highlight similarities and differences in different types of families. Families are an important part of children's lives and identities, therefore we aimed to support children's sense of identity by acknowledging and celebrating different types of families.

While discussing about families and their varying situations and experiences, we additionally aimed to support children's creativity, empathic and problem-solving skills.

A book about families

Taking into consideration that Finnish was a common and unifying language for all children in our target group, we settled on a Finnish language book about families called “Meidän ja Muiden Perheet” by Mary Hoffman and Ros Asquith.

According to Lennox (2013, p. 383), children learn best when engaged as active participants and when adults are aware and responsive to their current comprehension levels. We, therefore, utilised scaffolding to support children’s awareness and comprehension of various issues.

Cultures reflected through families

In our opinion, the strength of this session was that it addressed a topic all children could identify with. The session began by asking children to investigate the books cover. By looking at the people on the books covers, the children identified and named race, emotions, gender, and different dressing cultures.

Discussing families was an exciting topic for children, and collectively all managed to contribute toward other sub-topics such as different types of housing, careers, extended families, hobbies, food, and dress traditions.

Discussing challenging topics related to families

During the dialogic session, children expressed curiosity regarding issues that are often considered to be challenging or sensitive. References to death often came up, mostly when children were trying to deal with the topic of orphans and their plight. Adoption, child abandonment and foster homes were also mentioned, but notably, most children were unfamiliar with these concepts. For that reason, we explained these issues to them in age-appropriate ways. Additionally, children also made comments indicating their families’ religious practices, and even though it was not familiar nor relevant to all in the group, they could talk about it.

Creating awareness about homelessness

Another topic that led to a lively discussion was homelessness. It emerged that most children were unaware that there were homeless people in Finland. Resulting responses depicted developing imaginative skills and an attempt to seek solutions to the problematic situation. Emotions, opinions, and advice about homelessness were expressed.

This origami house crafts session

In order to support learning, crafts are frequently used in ECEC as forms of visual expression. The National Core Curriculum of ECEC (2016, p. 68) explains visual expression as an aesthetic experience that involves visual thinking, observation and interpretation of images whilst engaging multiple senses.

Our suggestion for book and character bonding activity will be a craft session called “My family house”. This simple origami family house craft will give children the chance to describe the uniqueness of their families. It will also help them to connect with the books discussed previously in the dialogic reading session. This craft session will also promote the development of children’s fine motor skills.

This origami house is easy to make. Material required are papers and colouring pens. After folding the paper, children can draw their family pictures. However, educators must demonstrate the folding technique to the children. Educators must also take each child’s fine motor skills into account to evaluate how much support is needed. This activity is best implemented in small groups. Refer to appendix 3 (4) for visual description of the craft making process.

Session reflection

This session about different types of families found its strength in the choice of a book, covering a subject child were familiar with and could readily connect to. As a result, the possibility of all participants to make valuable contributions was not deterred. Additionally, the content and illustrations in the book facilitated children’s connection through visualization. On the overall, the benefits of investigating the inclusive nature of books and availing them to the daycare was demonstrated in this session.

The role that educators can play in role modelling acknowledgement and appreciation for others was evident, and intercultural learning was supported by highlighting not only differences but similarities as well between various families. This was observed to create and maintain a positive and inclusive environment for the implementation of the activity.

A major achievement was the creation of awareness regarding homelessness in Finland. As a reverse effect, it also made educators aware of the risk for making generalised assumptions concerning what children are aware of.

During dialogic reading, scaffolding enabled children to reveal their empathic side and additionally prompted them to utilise their developing problem-solving skills. In trying to find solutions to different situations, children engage their imaginative skills, which was a positive outcome of the session.

Finally, by using a Finnish language book with varied illustrations, we managed to support Finnish language learning and increase vocabulary as well as comprehension.

10.2 Suggested activities for implementation

10.2.1 Brand new homes

Activity structure	Brief introduction. Dialogic reading in Finnish 30 minutes. Free play/circle time/crafts (35 minutes per activity). Final reflection / feedback.
Learning area as per the curriculum	Me and our community, rich world of languages, diverse forms of expression and I grow move and develop.
Transversal competences as per the curriculum	Cultural competences Interaction and self-expression, participation, and involvement, thinking and learning.
<p>Objectives of the activity for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To support and enhance participation and teamwork through extended activities - To support cooperation with parents and guardians through a home-based task - To support thinking and learning using reflection and questions - To support cultural competence by highlighting the skills and cultures of immigrants - To support empathic and problem-solving skills when discussing refugee experiences. - To create overall awareness about immigration as contributing factor to diverse societies. - To facilitate children's empowerment by creating awareness about their ability to positively influence the society. 	

Session aims

The aim of this session would be to create awareness about immigration because children in Finland see and interact with people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds and could benefit from understanding how people end up in other countries.

An article by Arvola, Lastikka and Reunamo (2017) researching on ways to increase immigrant children's participation in Finnish ECEC indicates that Finland is experiencing an increasing number of second born generation children as a result of immigration. In this article, the authors identified the significance of peer relations and play on participation. As a conclusion to their research, they highlighted the need for effective measures in ECEC that would support the participation of immigrant children and their families.

The used books

Two different books which highlight refugee children and their family's experiences are recommended. *Lost and Found Cat* by Doug Kuntz and Amy Shrodes tells the true story of an Iraqi family who are forced to flee their home, and secretly take along their pet cat which they cannot bear to leave behind all the way to Greece.

My Name is Not Refugee by Kate Milner is a story about a parent preparing her child for their upcoming journey. The parent emphasizes the need to pack only essentials, discusses feelings related to leaving one's home, imagines new experiences and frustrating moments, and looks forward to positive moments of finally settling into their new home.

Reasons why people move elsewhere

Using dialogic reading educators can prompt children to think about the different reasons why people immigrate. Work, marriage, joining family members, education, and searching for new or better experiences can be discussed and explained as some of the main reasons and examples are given whenever possible.

Tough situations/feelings

Fleeing dangerous situations should be discussed in an age-appropriate way, alert and sensitive to children's feelings, and the possibility that some may have direct experiences of the same. As a result, awareness would be created regarding some negative factors that also contribute to immigration.

Leaving one's home for a long or unknown period may arouse different types of feelings. Children's opinions can be explored with the aim of promoting empathy towards those who find themselves trying to cope with new environments. Comparisons can be made the children's first day at daycare or school.

What do they take with them?

This story can be used to teach children about making choices and prioritisation, by pondering on what things they feel are the most important to be taken along on a journey. Children can be asked to imagine what they would take along faced with the same decision. The concept of sharing can also be promoted by prompting children to decide in different groups, things that they could collectively benefit from. This would be a good way to enhance teamwork with peers, as well as negotiation skills. Conflict resolution and self-regulation skills can be supported in the event of disagreement between group members leading to negative feelings.

What new skills do immigrants bring to their new societies?

Through dialogic reading, positive attitudes towards immigrants can be promoted by prompting children to reflect on immigrants varied cultural traits, and personal skills that could be utilised in their new societies. Religion, food, and dress traditions, as well as languages, play and unique artefacts can be emphasised.

How can we help?

Empathic skills will be supported, with the additional step of empowering children to recognise that they can contribute towards making the society conducive for not only immigrants, but everyone in general. Children can be asked to imagine the positive ways they can contribute in the daycare and their home environments.

They can be asked to imagine the various things that they can teach, share, or do with the book's character in his new society. Play, trips, languages, dressing, tasting food, clothes, toys and books are suitable examples that can be used to demonstrate to children that they have the capacity to influence positively.

Valuable identities

Finally, the dialogic reading of the book "My Name is Not Refugee" aims at strengthening self-identity. In the final part of the book, the mother encourages the child to remember his true name and identity regardless of what else he hears or experiences. This would be an important conclusive message to all children to value who they are in every situation.

Suggested book and character bonding activities

1. Play

At the daycare children can use toys or the environment to create a new home for the book's characters.

2. My three favourite things

This activity can be done at home to involve parents. Children can be asked to take photos or describe three important items that they can take along on a journey, those of cultural significance included. During circle time children can discuss the reasons behind their individual choices.

3. Skills and identity passports.

Crafts can be utilised to make two-part cards to act as a passport (figure 2). On one section, identity is stated and on the other section, children state at least one thing or experience which they can teach or share with others. Refer to appendix 4 (1) for the craft making instructions.

10.2.2 A day in Kenyan child's life!

Activity structure	Brief introduction. Dialogic reading 30 minutes (English text read out in Finnish). Extended activities(30-45 minutes). Final reflection/ feedback.
Learning areas as per the curriculum	Me and our community, rich world of languages, diverse forms of expression. Participation and involvement.
Transversal competences as per the curriculum	cultural competences Interaction, and self-expression, participation, and involvement, thinking and learning.
<p>Objectives of the activity for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To support and enhance participation through various joint activities -To support thinking and learning using reflection, questions and prompting To facilitate comparison of cultural practices leading to cultural competence - To promote physical activity and movement by playing with the created ball outdoors or indoors- to support appreciation of the elderly as part of the community. -To create awareness about Kenyan culture and Swahili language -To promote social, emotional and skills. -To explore the simultaneous use of English and Finnish. 	

Session aims

The book "For you are a Kenyan child" describes the life of a boy living in a small Kenyan village. The main purpose of this session would be to highlight differences and similarities between Kenyan and other cultures, in an aim to promote diversity awareness. Other aims for this session included promoting physical activities, participation, thinking and learning, and social emotional skills.

Introducing the topic

Investigating the book cover would be a recommendable way to start the dialogic reading session. Examples of introductory questions that children can be asked are:

-What do you see on the cover of the book? Does it remind you of something or someone?

-How old might the child on the cover be? How can you tell /approximate the child's age?

-What do you think he is doing? Would you enjoy doing the same?

-In which country do you think he lives? do you know anything about that place?

Step 2

The children can be asked to first locate Africa and then Kenya on a map and tell what they know about these places. They can be also asked if they know someone from there.

Continuing into the dialogic session, the following are various cultural practices highlighted in the rest of the story which should be taken into consideration as important discussion points.

1. Children's chores

The boy in the book is described as waking up to the sound of a rooster's crow. Play can be incorporated into the dialogic reading session as a book and character bonding activity. Children can be asked to pretend to be asleep, and then a rooster's crow sound can first be played from a phone, then by the reader followed by the children in turns.

In the story, the boy goes to his grandmother's hut, most probably for breakfast. He is then entrusted with the day's responsibility of taking his grandfather's cattle to graze.

Children can be asked the following questions: Do their parents or siblings wake them up? Do they use an alarm clock? What is the first thing they do when they wake up? Who prepares their breakfast? Do they or their siblings have any household chores? If not, what do they feel capable of doing already at their current age?

2. A taste of Swahili

The words Hodi (knock, knock) and Karibu (you are welcomed) are repeatedly used in the story. Children can be encouraged to learn these words. Dramatization can be incorporated into the session by the reader making a knocking sound on an object and children responding with the correct Swahili words! Other words found within the book that the children can be encouraged to learn are: Mama (Mother), Jambo (Hello!).

Suggested book and character bonding activities

1. Innovative play

In the story, the boy meets another child who invites him to play. Looking at the picture's children can be asked to guess what kind of game it is. They can also be asked to guess what the ball is made of. After being told that it is made of rags and plastic bags, they can be asked to suggest other ways to make their ball and carefully consider the material suitable for use. Additionally, children can be informed about the ban that has been recently imposed on the use of plastic bags in Kenya as a measure to protect the environment. They can be prompted to think of ways to maintain safer sustainable environments.

A suggested book and character bonding activity would be making a ball out of rags and plastic bags. Parents can be involved by requesting them for plastic bags and rags from home. The children use the created balls during outdoor and indoor games.

2. How do you carry a baby in Kenya?

A picture in the book shows a girl carrying her baby brother, in a typical Kenyan way, on her back using a cloth. Girls in the Kenyan culture are explained as often helping parents care for the little ones! Comparisons can be made to how children in the group help care for their siblings.

A suggested book and character bonding activity could be a play session that includes carrying a baby on the back. Refer to appendix 4 (2).

3. Food culture

A breakfast meal (maize porridge) and other meals namely chapati and maziwa lala are mentioned in the book. Educators can prompt children into recognizing similarities between what children eat for breakfast in their homes and what is described in the story. The group can discuss healthy eating practices. A suggested book and character bonding activity would be making chapati with the child Reflection of the functional part.

11 Reflection of the functional part of the thesis

11.1 Reflection on the entire process

We began the reflection process by reviewing the relevance and strength of our topic and based on observed outcomes, reaffirmed its significance not only to the working life partner but also to the wider society. This development task provided an opportunity for children to learn, experience and understand things they have observed.

Dialogic reading was not an unfamiliar method to the working life partner. However, just like most pedagogical choices, creativity when introducing a new approach goes a long way in renewing children's interests. Our strategy had a pedagogical justification for it, confirmed by educators. Book and character bonding activities enriched our project because they supported content orientations as well as learning areas emphasised in the curriculum. Being able to preserve the value of learning through play and diverse forms of expressions as supported by our methods was of high pedagogical significance.

Even though intercultural learning can and should be facilitated in various settings, we feel that we identified a conducive working life partner. This daycare, with children and educators from diverse backgrounds, provided the opportunity to discuss a variety of issues, as well as to highlight as should be done, differences as well as similarities.

Additionally, achieving our thesis aims would not have been possible without good cooperation with the working life partner. It was highly resourceful to have had an opportunity to discuss with educators of various expertise regarding our aims. Their additional professional perspective supported our holistic approach and their participation in implementation sessions also provided us with practical help.

In order to support intercultural learning using our chosen methods, we recognised the importance of using suitable material. Local libraries proved to be a good resource, and we managed to identify and borrow books that could support our implementation plan. Preliminary information provided to us by the educators regarding the children guided our search.

Availing a broad selection of diverse children's literature in the daycare was a necessary and right step as it triggered children's curiosity. The books were made visible and easily

accessible to the children, parents, and guardians and therefore children had the opportunity to make independent reading choices.

Parents experienced a feeling of involvement because they could see what kinds of literature the children were being provided with. Parents and guardians contributed greatly to our development task. Their positive attitude towards our task was encouraging, and even though our observation was the base for evaluation, it was worthwhile noting that the tasks had had a wider effect and discussions about various issues had continued at home with parents. Moreover, an unanticipated and positive outcome was that some parents also borrowed the books for use at home and brought to the daycare some from their own home collection.

We noted, as a positive outcome, that other educators at the daycare began to make use of the books we had availed by reading them to the children. It was particularly encouraging to see educators who have primarily used Finnish with children in the past, read English language books to children. We enriched the functional part of the thesis by incorporating our own cultural backgrounds and linguistic skills. We did this by using elements from Arabic and Kenyan culture, as well as using English, Arabic and Swahili languages.

In conclusion, we feel that we managed to achieve our overall aims, even though we did not implement all planned sessions. During the implemented sessions we managed to cover various themes, and support issues discussed in and justified by our theoretical framework. We also identified topics and areas that could be developed further in the future.

11.2 Collective feedback

This section outlines the collective feedback that we continuously received from the children, educators, and parents, while and after implementing the dialogic reading sessions.

Children enjoyed and readily participated in the sessions which gave them the opportunity to share and discuss aspects related to their diverse backgrounds. As previously mentioned, our methodology relied heavily on observation of reactions and responses. There were however instances when children were directly asked for feedback and they

described the sessions as fun and exciting. Some things were considered strange did not deter children's overall interest and participation. The book and character bonding activities provided a sense of enjoyment, and we considered the fact that children wanted to repeat and prolong the activities as a positive feedback.

The additional questions and comments children raised after the sessions, based on their visible continued interest in the literature that had been available, was in our opinion, indirect and invaluable feedback. It was also appreciated that we allowed for additional time outside the specific sessions to further interact with the children and engage their additional questions and views. Flexibility and the ability to improvise were also noted as important traits that we demonstrated when working with children.

Pedagogically, educators regarded intercultural learning as a relevant and important topic. The sessions supported their ongoing efforts to facilitate an inclusive environment. We also went beyond recognising countries that children were from or languages they spoke, to facilitating opportunities to analyse cultures and diversity on a deeper level. Shared experiences and the awareness created were also positive outcomes.

Educators noted that availing a variety of books triggered new topics of discussions between children themselves as well as with their educators, which on our part was an aim achieved, and to them, a welcome change.

With regards to the quality of the sessions, educators felt that the sessions delivered a reasonable package of well thought out topics ranging from those which children were familiar with to completely new and interesting topics. Moreover, the nature of each topic was regarded as having contributed to learning and the development of other skills. Utilizing our own cultural backgrounds and the associated cultural elements such as language, religion, food, and dress culture, coupled with reminiscences of our own childhood experiences was viewed as enriching aspects to the whole process. It was also regarded as a positive aspect of our sessions that the sessions accommodated children of all ages, which matched the small group divisions in the daycare.

We also received feedback about having appropriately and professionally engaged children's curiosity during sessions. It was noted we employed a sensitive and respectful approach when dealing with challenging and not so frequently discussed topics.

Planning our sessions and availing materials to match the needs and nature of the working life partner was considered a pedagogically justified approach.

A cooperative culture with parents and guardians is at the heart of early childhood education and by going a step further beyond seeking their consent to being available to discuss the ongoing sessions with them, we received feedback. Most parents felt that this was a beneficial topic to their children. Some cited examples of how they had previously needed to address challenging questions and comments from their children regarding the same issues that we discussed through dialogic reading. Furthermore, because these sessions were implemented as part of the daycare routines, significant observations related to the children were noted, and discussed with parents. In line with daycare practices, it was important to discuss with parents the different skills that had been observed and supported, in addition to highlighting observed children's sense of esteem and cultural identity.

It was noted that the sessions fostered a positive, playful as well as humorous atmosphere. No rigid frameworks existed, and children could explore, joke, give incorrect answers as well as make multiple guesses in the process of learning. Appreciation and acknowledgement of others was also role modelled effectively. Our active participation in the bonding activities provided both amusement and motivation for children to engage further. In particular, the need to use drama more often with the children was noted.

Finally, another major outcome which educators noted as having been realized during the sessions was enhanced participation. In their opinion, dialogic reading was efficiently utilized to create a space for dialogue and enhanced interaction. Every opinion was welcomed and valued, and making children feel acknowledged was the motivation for participation.

12 Discussion and conclusion

Drawing conclusions based on the outcomes of this functional thesis, we concur that intercultural learning in early childhood should be emphasised and supported using diverse children's literature alongside other various channels. It is our view that it not only supports children's current interactions but rather it also leaves an imprint on lifelong skills that can be utilized in societies that have been described as constantly changing, requiring children to acquire adaptation skills and knowledge from early stages.

There is a need to support children in understanding differences and appreciating them. Even when this proves to be a challenge, intercultural learning supports a mindset that can promote peaceful coexistence. Intercultural learning also prides itself in the joy of discovering similarities, which serve to unite. On a personal level, children can from early stages be taught about their importance and significance to the wider society. It is only when all individuals understand the true meaning of diversity, that they will realise that they are part of the “puzzle”.

It was previously mentioned that children are alert to events occurring around them, making the actions of those they interact with significant to their learning processes. During the sessions, children revealed their knowledge about various topics. It also emerged that domestic and international travel as well as different forms of social interactions had exposed the children to different forms of diversity and cultural elements. It was also clear that parents and other people within their close networks provided a rich source of knowledge to the children.

Additionally, it was also evident that children's perspectives were dependent on their ages and development stages. In this functional thesis, supporting intercultural learning therefore did not occur in a “complete vacuum”. In one way or other children had either heard, seen or experienced discussed topics. Consequently, the dialogic reading sessions expanded and enhanced existing and varied levels of knowledge. Based on observation, we reiterate the importance of accommodating children's opinions and questions. Play and other pedagogical activities were also affirmed as effective tools for intercultural learning.

It was previously discussed that educators play an important role of opening windows and mirrors, to let in diversity awareness. From this task, the importance of seeking new information and using new methods and materials was demonstrated. Equally important was fostering a conducive environment for children to learn from each other.

Intercultural learning does not assume to have all the answers, but it surely tries to find them. Sometimes the answers exist amongst us, hence for educators, it is a call to utilise their own cultural and diverse backgrounds as well as that of the children and their families.

Intercultural learning can be equated with intercultural understanding as a process, it has been demonstrated that neither educators nor children need to abandon their own identities in the process of accommodating that of others. The road to peaceful coexistence begins with accommodating other people's perspectives and understanding the reasoning behind them.

Intercultural learning has also been discussed to foster and promote creativity. Whilst old familiar methods are equally valuable, there is a call to draw from diversity's well and create new meaningful experiences. It is a call for visibility, which should not only be seen through diverse literature and speech, but also in play, costumes, toys, food, and music. Different languages also emerged as effective tools for intercultural learning.

On a final note, we also wish to draw educator's attention towards parents as valuable assets for intercultural learning. From this task, we recognised the need to involve them more, not only for consultation but also for active participation in activities being planned and implemented in Early childhood education.

Intercultural learning and diversity awareness are continuous processes. It can be compared to a journey on a long and wide road. It is therefore recommended to start early, and without rush accommodate children as travelers, with their explorative and curious minds. Patience must also be exercised, because it is highly possible that upon reaching the destination, new themes may surface, or familiar concepts might evolve calling for intercultural learning to begin again.

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The Evaluation Guideline/ Checklist

Evaluation Guideline/ Checklist	
DIVERSITY	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Awareness about the different forms of diversity. 2. Familiarity with people from diverse backgrounds. 3. Perspectives about different forms of diversity.
LANGUAGE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Familiarity with / ability to use different languages. 2. Willingness to learn experiment with new words. 3. Spontaneous use of mother tongue languages during sessions. 4. Associating language with self of people they know. 5. Combining languages during active speech.
CULTURAL COMPETENCE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Familiarity with/ Inquiring about different certain cultural practices. 2. Willingness to experiment new cultural experiences. 3. Sharing knowledge regarding own cultures.
SELF ESTEEM/ SENSE OF IDENTITY	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Acknowledgement of topics /characters similar to them/their experiences. 2. Eagerness and willingness to contribute towards topics of personal significance. 3. Associating book /character aspects with themselves or people close to them.
EMPATHY	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visible display of emotions towards explained experiences or situations. 2. Attempts to understand occurrences better or deeper. 3. Attempts to seek solutions to situations.
PARTICIPATION.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Willingness to contribute to sessions. 2. Taking up different roles. 3. Interest to continue participating.
Empowerment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognising and naming personal skills. 2. Willingness to share knowledge or skills. 3. Utilising problem solving skills. 4. Voicing out opinions, confidence and creativity.

Guardians' Consent Form



Espoon kaupunki

SUOSTUMUS

Huoltajan suostumus oppilaan osallistumisesta tutkimuksen aineiston tuottamiseen

Lapsen nimi: [REDACTED]

1 TUTKIMUKSEN TIEDOT	Tutkimuksen nimi Dialogical reading and utilisation of culturally diverse childrens literature to support intercultural learning. [REDACTED] Lyhyt kuvaus tutkimuksen sisällöstä (max. 160 merkkiä) Tuetaan lasten monikulttuurisuutta ja monimuotoisuutta koskevaa tietoisuutta ja oppimista käyttämällä suomen ja muiden kielten kirjoja. [REDACTED] Organisaatio/yksikkö, johon tutkimus tehdään Ullanmaäen päiväkotii. Tutkimuksen tarkoitus <input type="checkbox"/> Pro gradu <input type="checkbox"/> Lisensiaattityö <input type="checkbox"/> Väitöskirja <input type="checkbox"/> Muu opinnäytetyö <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Muu, mikä? [REDACTED]
2 TUTKIJAN TIEDOT	Etu- ja sukunimi Susan Nyangena ja Mina Al- Shaibane. Sähköpostiosoite susan.nyangena@metropolia.fi Puhelin [REDACTED] Tutkimuksen vastuullinen johtaja / arvo Satu Hakanen ja Jukka Törnroos..
3 SUOSTUMUS	<input type="checkbox"/> Annan suostumukseni sille, että lapseni osallistuu edellä kuvatun tutkimustyön aineiston tuottamiseen <input type="checkbox"/> En anna suostumustani lapseni osallistumiseen tähän tutkimukseen
4 ALLEKIRJOITUKSET	Huoltajan allekirjoitus Nimenselvennys [REDACTED] Paikka ja aika [REDACTED]
5 TUTKIMUSLUPA	Tutkimukselle on myönnetty Espoon sivistystoimen tutkimuslupa. N:ro 14/2020 pvm. 25.02.2020

Activities' Used Books, Materials and Pictures

The First Session Used Book, Used Pictures and the book bonding activity pictures

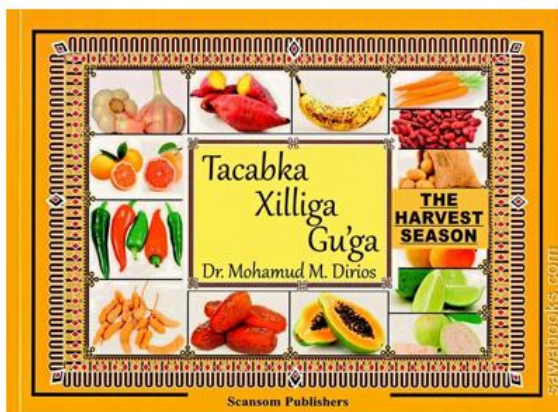


The Second Session Used Book and Song



The image shows a worksheet for a song. At the top, there are two cartoon owls (one blue, one pink) and a musical note. Below them are several lines of text. The first part of the text is in English: 'The more we play (together x 3)', 'The more we play together', 'The happier well be!', 'Coz your friend is my friend and my friend is your friend', 'The more we play together', 'The happier well be!'. Below this is a line of text in Finnish: '(sing, build, draw, dance, jump, run, read, eat)'. The second part of the text is in Finnish: 'KUN LEIKITÄÄN YHDESSÄ', 'HAUSKA SE ON!', 'KAVERISI OLEN', 'KAVERINI OLET', 'KUN LEIKITÄÄN YHDESSÄ', 'HAUSKA SE ON!'. At the bottom right, there is a small illustration of a person playing a blue instrument. The worksheet is decorated with small hearts and musical notes.

The Third Session Used Books and Book Bonding Activity's basket picture



The Fourth Session Used Book and Book Bonding Activity's Suggested Craft



Family Origami Craft House



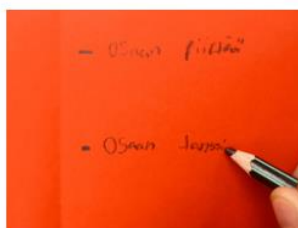
Diverse children's literature Availed to the daycare



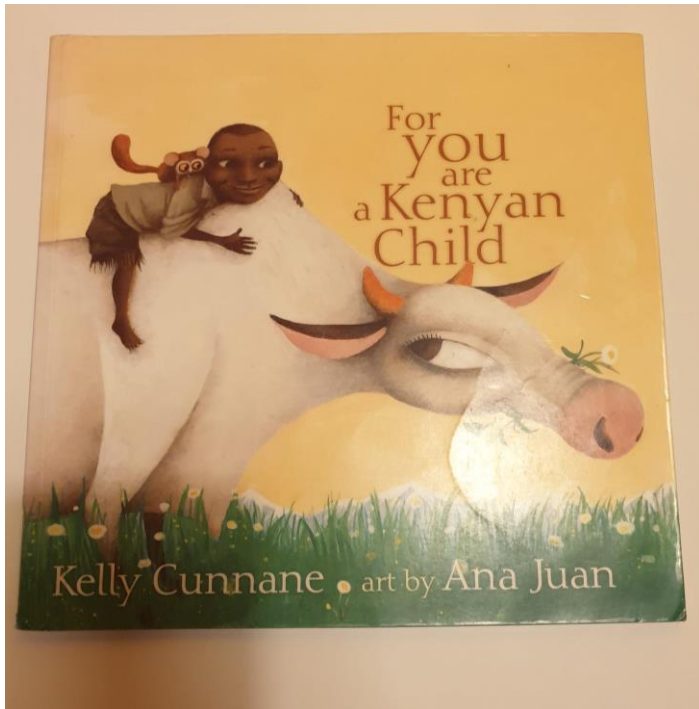
Books and Activities for the Suggested Sessions

1. For Brand New Home Session

The Passport Craft



2. For A Day in Kenyan Child's Life Session



Children's collective responses translated from Finnish to English

<p>What do you see on the cover of the book?(forms of diversity)</p> <p>There are people with different skin colours. There is a lady covering her hair. There is a girl. But she is a boy. A happy baby. It's not hungry. A man with a strange looking outfit. Happy, sad and angry people. Red riding hood looks different. She looks like Susan. A boy who looks like me.</p>	<p>How can people survive without money? (Creativity and problemsolving)</p> <p>Do not rob others because you'll end up in jail! Clean neighbours' homes and ask for money. Ask the postman for money. Get money from the cash machine. It's not possible at all. Collect and recycle bottles. Collect trash around the city. Get rid of old money and get new money.</p>
<p>How can we make the daycare safer? (Ethical thinking)</p> <p>Be good friends. By helping each other. Tell an adult if you bullied. Move all the furniture for the wheelchair to fit. We should not hurt each other.</p>	<p>Why do some children live with their grandparents?(Awareness)</p> <p>If their parents die or abandon them. If a parent goes to war and dies. If parents are no longer able to cope. Maybe mommy wants to have a peaceful time. Grandparents like their grandchildren. Parents may might have travelled abroad.</p>
<p>What are grandparents like? (perspectives on the elderly)</p> <p>They are fun to be with. They do not like loud noises. Sometimes they get tired. They do not like to rush. My Grandmother makes delicious food They take care of us at times. They like us.</p>	<p>WORLDVIEWS</p> <p>A church is that place where church bells ring. We sing in church as well ! Islam! I know what it is..it is at home! God provides and decides. Tell the wolf calmly "Allhamdullilah".</p> <p>EMPATHY</p> <p>What happens to homeless people?</p> <p>It's not fun at all, because it gets cold outside. It is not safe for them. Children sleep on the streets.</p>